CONTEXTUAL- AND INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL DETERMINANTS OF POLITICAL TOLERANCE IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

A Senior Scholars Thesis

by

JOHN DAVID WATKINS

Submitted to the Office of Undergraduate Research
Texas A&M University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the designation as

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOLAR

April 2007

Major: Sociology

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Approved by:

Research Advisor:	Robert Mackin
Associate Dean for Undergraduate Research:	Robert C. Webb

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ABSTRACT

Contextual- and Individual-Level Determinants of Political Tolerance in Developing Countries (April 2007)

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Scholars of political tolerance have limited their investigations to the most developed democracies in the world, with few exceptions. This research seeks to redress this shortfall by analyzing tolerance for civil liberties across democracies of varying stability and development. To what extent do the explanations of tolerance derived from previous studies on developed states apply elsewhere? In exploring this question, this study disaggregates the effects of national context from the characteristics of individuals. Data on individuals are drawn from the World Values Survey, a dataset which includes representative samples from dozens of nations. Institutional, economic, and conflict intensity data from various sources are combined to test the impact of national context on tolerance. As found in previous studies, age and education are strongly related to tolerance. At the contextual-level, the intensity of recent armed conflicts is the best predictor of average tolerance across nations, even when controlling for political and economic attributes. This finding contributes to the growing body of evidence citing threat as an antecedent of intolerance. In this case the effect is especially surprising, as

the groups against which respondents chose to discriminate are generally not involved in the conflict.

DEDICATION

This endeavor is the first of many to be dedicated to Ebru Gönülal for her patience, love and strength in challenging and uncertain times. Seni çok seviyorum, Ebus!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: TOWARDS A SOLUTION TO THE PARADOX OF POLITICAL TOLERANCE

Boutros Boutros-Ghali expressed the view of scholarly consensus when he wrote that democracy is not limited to the institutional framework that provides opportunities for citizens to decide the course of government, but democracy "also needs to be embodied in a culture, a state of mind that fosters tolerance and respect for other people, as well as pluralism, equilibrium and dialogue between the forces that make up a society" (2000:10). That is, democracy entails the institutions *and attitudes* that facilitate non-violent conflict resolution and public decision-making. An effective democratic political structure, then, requires some amount of toleration, insofar as it is a method for incorporating disagreement in a manner which encourages respectful coexistence among many groups wielding asymmetrical social power.

Though tolerance is perceived as fundamental to pluralist democracy, scholars consistently find high rates of intolerance among citizens of the world's most stable democracies (Stouffer 1955; Sullivan, Piereson and Marcus 1979; Mondak and Sanders 2003). Some take this as evidence that tolerance is perhaps not as important to

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This thesis follows the style and format of *Social Forces*.

democratic practice as previously thought. Others have formulated theories that attempt to reconcile this ostensible contradiction. [1]

Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus (1979) posited that because individuals cannot agree on which group's liberties to limit, what amounts to a coordination failure diminishes their ability to do anything at all. Therefore, the frequency of tolerance is not as important as the distribution of intolerance across groups. Sullivan and colleagues referred to this popular perspective as "pluralistic intolerance." There is still disagreement, however, as to what extent this theory is applicable to the United States.

Whatever the underlying mechanism causing the disconnect between widespread intolerant attitudes and intolerant behavior, the fact remains that we do not understand tolerance well within even the most commonly studied nations. Gibson (2006) argues that cross-national studies may help us reevaluate existing theories of tolerance and forge new ones in the process. In doing so, we can discover which previous conclusions apply across countries of differing levels of development. What is different in the less developed nations and what could account for any variation? This study attempts to address this question, while disaggregating the effects of individual-level factors from those of national context. Such delineation has not been possible in research pertaining only to a single country.

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[1] Karpov (2002) provides a succinct overview of the most prevalent theoretical perspectives for approaching the study of tolerance.

CHAPTER II

ISSUES IN THE TOLERANCE LITERATURE

Conceptualization and definitions

This study investigates an issue that is spoken of often in politics, education, and the media. Concepts often develop individualized, emotional, vague, and confusing meanings under such circumstances. Tolerance is no exception. The version of tolerance generally advocated is problematic for study, as there is no public consensus on what exactly it is.

In the political discourse of the United States, tolerance can mean either 1.) hating a group, but not enough to harm them (a meaning encountered often in hate crime legislation); or 2.) allowing some amount of penitentiary leeway to violators of a law (usually found only in its negated configuration, as in 'zero-tolerance' drug laws).

Because of the vague nature of the term as popularly defined, this study follows the tradition of separating the concept of "political tolerance" from its more emotionally invested progenitor. The specific manifestation of tolerance important to the study of democracy and human rights is its role in shaping public understandings of the political process. How do citizens of a country view social and political groups with which they disagree? Would they allow these groups to participate in the same roles as a group that is considered more agreeable? This conceptualization of tolerance is more amenable to research.

Students of political tolerance have found much more agreement as to what is important about this concept than the general public has. Following decades of scholarly consensus, I will investigate political tolerance insofar as it is a representation of "the willingness of the citizens of a polity to extend the full rights of citizenship to members of a disliked, but legally-entitled political or social association."

Measuring tolerance

The study of tolerance as it is known among scholars today began with the influential *Communism, Conformity and Civil Liberties* by Samuel Stouffer (1955). In the context of McCarthyism and a renewed "Red Scare," Stouffer wished to discover differences between mass and elite tolerance, while gauging more generally to what extent Americans would be willing to deny the civil liberties of compatriots who identify as communists, socialists, or atheists. Perhaps the most shocking finding of the study was that a majority of those surveyed was found to be *intolerant* toward the groups chosen by Stouffer.

The pioneering Stouffer study laid the groundwork for future studies of tolerance in the United States and abroad. So influential was his work that the same tolerance measurement technique is still utilized by the National Opinion Research Center for the General Social Survey. This measure would guide decades of research until Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus (1979) developed an alternative method, premised on the assumption that intolerance can best be inferred when individuals deny the civil liberties

of a group they particularly dislike, rather than groups chosen by the researcher.[2] Though the Stouffer technique is still used (Moore and Ovadia, 2006), scholars generally recognize the importance of establishing that individual affinities toward the group do not spuriously imply tolerance. For example, if researchers ask individuals if they are willing to tolerate communists, respondents who identify strongly with that group are unlikely to provide intolerant responses. These responses would be recorded as tolerant, but incorrectly so: the respondent simply did not have the opportunity to express intolerance. For this reason, the "content-controlled," least-liked group technique invented by Sullivan and his colleagues pervades recent literature on tolerance.

The content-controlled measure of tolerance is especially important for comparative studies. The salience of different group identities across national contexts complicates the traditional Stouffer method, as the researcher would have to select a group known to be equally controversial in each country in the study. The least-liked group method standardizes responses by establishing that individuals are refusing to tolerate some group that is important to them, rather than one that the researcher considers important. For instance, we would not expect Azeris to be concerned about the Klu Klux Klan in any respect; nor would we generally expect Americans to have an opinion about Armenians. Asking a question concerning the rights of either of these groups across dissimilar countries would only elicit arbitrary responses and significant error. Because

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[2] Sniderman et al. (1989) and Gibson (1992) provide critiques of the new method. Sniderman et al. disagree with the assumption that tolerance requires dislike, while Gibson finds that the results provided by the least-liked group method are largely equivalent to those of Stouffer's technique.

of the vastly differing political and social priorities found globally, the present research utilizes the least-liked group to minimize measurement error when comparing across the international sample.

Determinants of tolerance in developed countries

I will test several individual-level hypotheses supported by past studies of the developed world. First, educational level should be positively related to tolerance (Bobo and Licari 1989). Second, as others have found age to be negatively related to tolerance, I expect the same results in the international sample (Stouffer 1955; Sullivan, Piereson and Marcus 1982). Finally, those who report preferences for freedom over order and support for democracy should be more tolerant than those who do not (Gibson 1986).

The importance of tolerance to young democracies

Only recently have studies begun to emerge that consider the importance of national context to tolerance (Gibson 2006; Hutchison and Gibler 2007; Karpov 2002; Marsh 2005; Peffley 2003). What bearing does tolerance have on the economic and political development of younger states? First, Social Identity theorists consider intolerance an important precursor to conflict (Gibson 2006). Tolerance is therefore a potential safeguard against violence. Furthermore, citing the work of Richard Florida, Moore and Ovadia (2006) argue that intolerance may have negative economic implications as innovation increasingly comes from the non-traditional creative class within cities.

Potential contextual predictors of tolerance

As Gibson (1992) demonstrates, *perceptions* of freedom or the lack thereof can be just as important in determining action as government sanctions. The belief that the government or other citizens will view an action unfavorably can severely curtail expressions of civil liberties, even in a superlatively free nation. This implies a certain level of self-censorship that can cripple the exchange of ideas that allows for responsive democratic governance. Through this process, intolerance functions at the individual, community and governmental levels to foster an atmosphere of conformity rather than expression. The implications of these findings are important for young democracies which are attempting to establish the institutions and political culture that, at least, do not actively discourage dissent. Contextual Hypothesis 1.) Because of the link between contextual tolerance and individual tolerance, I expect to find higher levels of tolerance where expression of political rights is freer.

An economically successful nation and its populace should have more diverse possibilities for ameliorating conflict, such as litigation. Because of this, it should be easier for people to settle disputes and work through differences. Contextual Hypothesis 2.) Economic development is positively related to tolerance.

Large discrepancies in wealth distribution could lead to interclass conflict and have been shown to have negative impacts on democratization and regime stability (Muller 1995). I therefore expect to find a negative relationship between wealth equality and tolerance. Contextual Hypothesis 3.) Economic equality is negatively correlated with tolerance.

Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus (1982) found that perceptions of threat from a particular group decrease tolerance for the same. Despite numerous subsequent studies confirming this link, little research has focused on the nature of these threat perceptions, as Gibson notes (2006). All prior studies employ abstract threat ratings toward a particular group and at least one uses a threat measurement based on territorial threats (Hutchison and Gibler 2007), but no research has analyzed the effects on tolerance made by "actualized threats" in the form of conflict. This lack of investigation is surprising, given that violence is perhaps the most alarming threat citizens face. Contextual Hypothesis 4.) I expect to find lower levels of political tolerance among citizens of countries recently involved in intense combat.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Individual-level variables

This study analyzes aggregated secondary data from a variety of sources. The dataset from which individual-level variables are derived is the World Values Survey (WVS) for the years 1995-1998 (Inglehart 2003). The WVS provides one of the most thorough collections of global attitudes ever produced and includes several indicators of tolerance for unpopular groups' civil liberties.

Tolerance is measured through a set of questions in the WVS which ask respondents to what extent they would extend civil liberties to a group they dislike. Respondents were first shown a list of unpopular groups and asked to pick the one they disliked the most, or to provide the name of some other more disliked group. The list was devised using an understanding of each country's political and social climate and were therefore well-suited to different contexts. For example, in nations in which religious affiliation is not as salient as ethnicity, it would make sense to include categories for ethnic groups rather than Jews or Christians. The most commonly selected least-liked groups and the proportion of all respondents selecting each are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1: The Five Most Frequently Selected Least-Liked Groups

Group	N	Percentage of Total
Neo-Nazis	8468	35.4%
Communists	3183	13.3%
Capitalists	1754	7.3%
Homosexuals	1637	6.8%
Immigrants	1332	5.6%

After choosing their least-liked group, respondents were asked if the group should or should not be allowed to hold public demonstrations, hold public office, or teach in schools. Though eligibility for a teaching position is not usually considered a civil liberty, the rights of legally-entitled groups to earn representation and express dissent are at the heart of the democratic process. Because the first two survey items most precisely quantify the concept of political tolerance as it relates to the distribution of democratic procedural rights, they were used to construct an index with a range of 0, indicating the respondent would disallow both activities by his or her least-liked group, to 2, indicating permission of both activities.

Unfortunately, one of the answer categories offered to *all* respondents does not suit the conceptualization of tolerance used in this study. The answer category "Criminals" poses several serious methodological problems, while also happening to be a somewhat enticing selection as a disliked group. Everyone is intolerant of some type of criminal, though different thresholds for tolerable criminality certainly exist. Indeed, intolerance for deviant or destructive behavior is the basis for systems of justice. Additionally, convicted criminals often are not legally entitled to the same rights as other citizens.

This requirement is specified in the definition of political tolerance here employed. Finally, criminality is defined differently across cultures and nations. There are issues of cross-national comparability when a vague category such as this is used.

For all of the reasons above, it is illogical to try to measure political tolerance when the respondent's least-liked group is "Criminals." Respondents who chose this answer are therefore excluded from the analysis. The elimination of these responses resulted in unacceptable data loss in many of the sampled countries. Following the method used by Peffley (2003), I removed nations from the study which had fewer than 500 cases afterwards.[3] The final sample includes 26 nations, 19 of which are considered developing. Table 2 displays the final list of countries included in the analysis and the number of cases drawn from each.

[3] An exception to this rule was made for New Zealand, which was short by three respondents. The difference in sampling error between 497 and 500 respondents is negligible.

Table 2: Sampled Nations and Sample Sizes

Country	N	Country	N
Developed			
Australia	1524	**Sweden**	729
Germany	1564	**Switzerland**	707
New Zealand	496	**USA**	784
Spain	981		
Developing			
Argentina	605	**Peru**	895
Armenia	1347	**Philippines**	695
Azerbaijan	688	**Romania**	543
Bangladesh	1184	**Russia**	592
Brazil	522	**South Africa**	1318
Colombia	2759	**Slovakia**	502
Czech Republic	583	**Slovenia**	574
Georgia	1478	**Ukraine**	680
India	664	**Uruguay**	504
Mexico	1017		

The measurement problems do not end with the criminal category. The WVS also included several other groups on the least-liked group list that are not legally entitled to the same rights as other citizens: narco-trafficants, terrorists, guerrillas, paramilitary organizations, and the Peruvian insurgent group Sendero Luminoso. All of these groups are illegal wherever they operate and their inclusion may therefore contribute additional measurement error. For example, of those who chose Sendero Luminoso as their least-liked group (N=722), 96.5% would deny them the rights to hold office and demonstrate. The inclusion of the violent group Shiv Sena in India raises similar concerns. As Sniderman et al. argue,

> "…it is intolerant to refuse to accept as legitimate a group merely because its ideas are different; it is by no means intolerant - indeed, it may reflect an effort to defend tolerance - to refuse to accept as legitimate a group

> because its conduct is violent and illegal. To refuse to tolerate socialists is to be intolerant; but to refuse to tolerate terrorists is to be tolerant" (1989:42).

To discover any differences due to the inclusion of these groups, I coded a variable corresponding to the legality of the chosen group. The above were coded as 0 for being essentially criminal, while any other group was coded as legal. Least-liked group legality and tolerance are very weakly correlated ($r = 0.094$) when excluding the "Criminals" category, leading me to believe the inclusion of these groups does not introduce significant error.

These problems bring up a general issue with least-liked group measurement of political tolerance: individuals could have picked one of these or some other illegal group *themselves* by selecting the "Other" category. A possible solution for future survey researchers is to make note of the groups that would otherwise go under the "Other" category, and to discard all illegal groups. This should be done so as to exclude any value judgments on the behalf of the researcher. If the group has collectively and verifiably broken national laws in the past or is by definition illegal, as in the case of criminals and terrorists, in what way could refusing this group procedural rights be considered intolerance rather than merely expressing the will of existing laws?

In order to measure respondents' support for democratic ideals, two items were selected. The first asked if government's most important responsibility is to maintain order or respect freedom, coded as 0 or 1, respectively. The second item asked the respondent to

what extent he or she agrees or disagrees with the statement "It is important to have a democratic system," coded 0 – 4, strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Education is difficult to measure across countries due to differing systems and average levels of attainment. Luckily, the WVS provides an alternate educational level variable, recoded into low, medium, and high (0 – 2) categories based on researchers' understandings of each country's relative levels of educational attainment (Inglehart 2003). Age is also measured by a recoded categorical variable, ranked youngest to oldest, 0 – 6.

As suggested by Mondak and Sanders (2003), a control variable was included to separate general prejudice from intolerance. An item on the WVS asked respondents to select any groups which they would *not* like to have as neighbors, of a list including homosexuals, immigrants, and political extremists. A discriminatory attitude toward all three groups is coded as a 0, indicating low willingness to accept diversity, and selecting none of the groups is coded as a 3.

Because previous studies have found females to be somewhat less tolerant than males overall (Sullivan, Piereson and Marcus 1982), I control for gender in my analysis, as well. Females are coded as 1 and males as 0.

Contextual measurement

National-level variables are derived from several different sources. Freedom House publishes assessments judging the prevalence of government support for political rights every year for most nations of the world. I use this assessment for the year of the WVS

in order to test the impact of a climate of free political expression on tolerance. The political rights index measures the opportunities of people to participate freely in the political process, including "the right to vote and compete for public office and to elect representatives who have a decisive vote on public policies" (Freedom House 2006). Each country was scored between one and seven, with higher scores indicating a *less* desirable political climate.

I test the effects of economic factors using data from the World Development Indicators database (World Bank 2006). Human Development Index (HDI), which is calculated by combining indexes of gross domestic product per capita, literacy, school enrollment, and life expectancy, indicates a nation's level of development. This variable ranges from 0 to 1, where 1 is the highest score possible. Wealth inequality is measured by the Gini index, where 0 is perfect equality and 100 is perfect inequality.

In order to measure the impact of recent conflict intensity on tolerance, I incorporated data from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program / International Peace Research (UCDP/PRIO) Armed Conflict dataset (Gleditsch et al. 2002). I recoded conflict events for the *3 years* before World Values Survey administration into an ordinal variable with a range of 0 – 2. A score of 0 indicates fewer than 25 battle deaths for the nation within the last 3 years, a 1 indicates between 25 and 1000 battle deaths, and a 2 indicates high intensity conflict of 1000 or more battle deaths.

A multi-level model of tolerance

Because I expect some amount of tolerance to be due to the grouping of respondents

within specific countries and because the data I analyze are multi-level in nature, I utilize Hierarchical Linear and Nonlinear Model (HLM) estimation. HLM corrects for potential biases due to either of these factors by estimating separate variance structures for individuals within particular countries (Hutchison and Gibler 2007; Raudenbush and Bryk 2002).

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Table 3 displays HLM output for the 4 models designed to test micro- and macro-level hypotheses. The dependent variable for all models is the tolerance index discussed earlier, which has a range of 0 – 2. Model 1 tests the three individual-level hypotheses only. Models 2 through 4 add contextual variables in steps.

Table 3: HLM Output for Micro- and Macro-Level Variables' Effects on Tolerance Index

Fixed-Effects	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Individual-level (N=23,935)				
Female (1=Yes)	-0.056**	-0.056**	-0.056**	-0.056**
Age	-.0 016**	-.0 016**	-0.016**	-0.016**
Education	0.079**	0.079**	0.079**	0.079**
Acceptance of Diversity	0.028**	0.028**	0.028**	0.028**
Democratic Preference	0.021	0.021	0.021	0.021
Freedom > Order	0.048**	0.048**	0.048**	0.048**
Contextual-level (N=26)				
Political Rights		-0.049**	-0.084*	-0.052
HDI			-0.482	-0.464
Gini Index			0.002	0.004
Conflict Intensity				-0.083*
Random-Effects				
Variance Component	0.032	0.027	0.023	0.020
% Cross-National Variance Explained by Macro-model		15.6%	28.1%	37.5%
Chi-Square	2599.52	2195.49	1771.09	1602.597
Degrees of Freedom	25	24	22	21
Probability	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

Note: Entries are full maximum-likelihood coefficients estimated with HLM 6.02.
* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$.

Education's coefficient is statistically significant and positive (b = .079) as expected when controlling for all other micro-level variables, indicating that my first hypothesis is supported by the data. As found in previous studies of developed countries, those with

higher educational levels are more likely to be tolerant than others. The relationship is displayed in graphical form in Figure 1 below, with the dependent variable on the y-axis.

Hypothesis 2 is also supported by the output, as age and tolerance are significantly and negatively related (b = -0.016). This relationship is depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 1. The Effect of Education on Tolerance

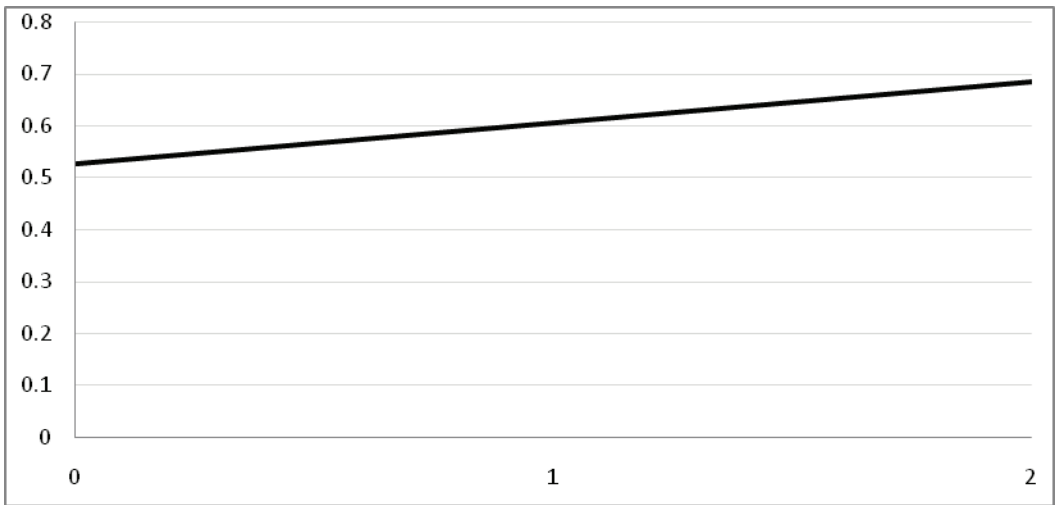
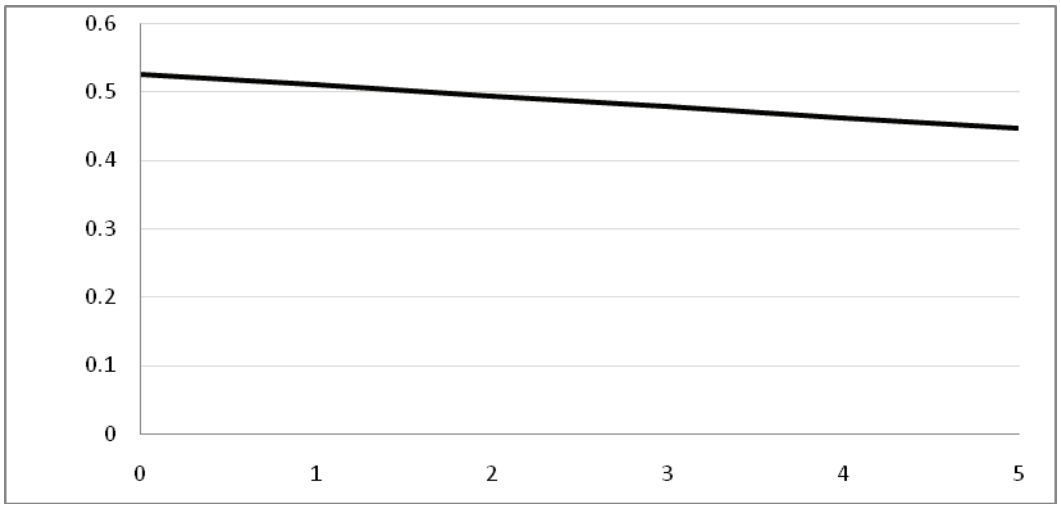


Figure 2. The Effect of Age on Tolerance



The third hypothesis, which stated that support for democracy and a preference for freedom over order are positively related to tolerance, is less clear. The first element, support for democratic governance, is not significantly related to tolerance, while the second part, a preference for freedom over order, is supported by the data ($b = 0.048$, $p < 0.01$). I assumed there would be significant overlap between these variables, though this is not the case. Moreover, as the latter variable is coded dichotomously, its effect on tolerance when controlling for other factors is unimportant, even if it is significant.

Model 2 tests my first contextual hypothesis, which supposed that those in nations in which political rights were better institutionalized would tend to be more tolerant. This hypothesis finds support in the model, as the coefficient is significant and predicts the correct direction (since the index is negative). The large decrease in the chi-square statistic with the addition of the political rights index indicates that it has accounted for some of the unexplained variation between nations and improved the overall goodness of fit (Hutchison and Gibler, 2007). The political rights index remains statistically significant when controlling for individual-level and economic factors, but not when controlling for conflict intensity.

The third model incorporates the economic factors hypothesized to affect political tolerance. My second and third contextual hypotheses, which stated that economic development and equality, respectively, would be positively related to tolerance, are *not*

supported by the data. The third model does, however, improve the fit of the model and explain some of the variation across nations.

The final model incorporates all contextual- and individual-level variables. Conflict intensity is statistically significant and negatively related to political tolerance (b = -0.083), despite controlling for all other included factors. This supports my final contextual hypothesis. Furthermore, the inclusion of conflict intensity substantially decreases the unexplained cross-national variance. Figure 3 displays the relationship between conflict intensity and tolerance graphically. Figure 4 charts the relationship between education and tolerance across levels of conflict intensity, illustrating the intersection of the individual- and contextual-levels.

Kreft and de Leeuw (1998) suggest a measure of the percentage of between-unit variance, or error, explained by successive multi-level models, calculated by the formula ($Model_i$ variance – $Model_{i+1}$ variance) / $Model_i$ variance; where i denotes the initial model. Calculations for this measure are in Table 3. The addition of the political rights index alone explains 15.6% of the variance in tolerance between nations; adding economic measures explains 28.1% of this error; and model 4, which includes conflict intensity, accounts for 37.5% of the between-unit variance. This indicates that the final model explains a significant amount of cross-national variance, though substantial estimation error remains.

Figure 3. Conflict Intensity on Tolerance

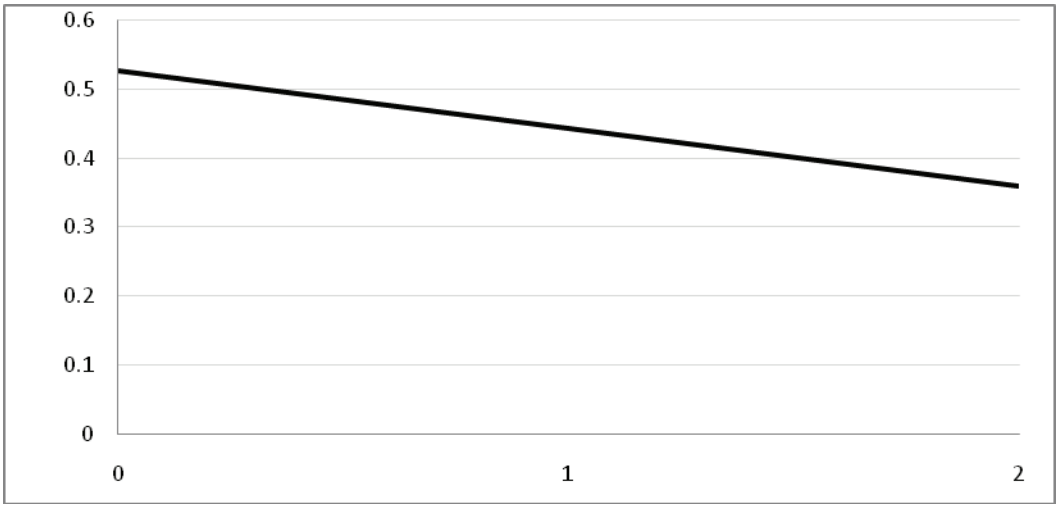
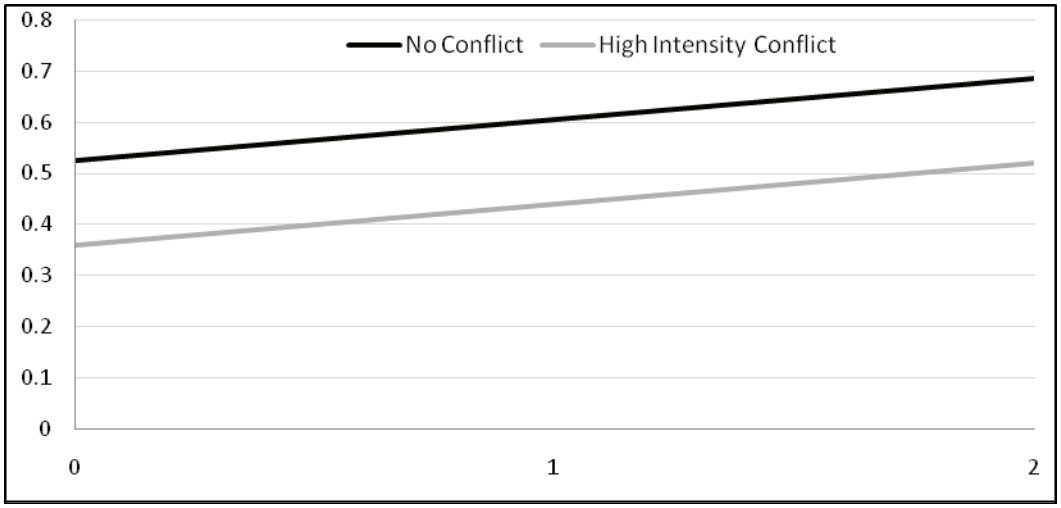


Figure 4. Conflict Intensity and Education (X-axis) on Tolerance (Y-axis)



CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This research set out to answer two questions. First, to what extent do theories derived from the study of tolerance in the most developed countries apply to other countries? Of the three hypotheses tested to investigate the applicability of existing theory, two were supported by the multi-level analysis above. Across a large, international sample, older and less educated people tend to be less tolerant than younger and more educated people. Commitment to abstract democratic values did not appear to exert much influence on political tolerance.

The second research question asked what contextual factors account for the variation in levels of tolerance across nations? The analysis presented above indicates that recent conflict intensity is a robust predictor of tolerance, even when controlling for economic factors and the institutionalization of political rights. This finding adds new perspective to a strong literature of threat as antecedent to intolerance, as this is the first to test the effects of "actualized threat." No causation can be inferred from this cross-sectional study, however, so we do not know if intolerance is causing conflict, or conflict is causing intolerance (or neither). Fortunately, this does not diminish the importance of the theoretical linkage. Considering that a negligible proportion of respondents chose a least-liked group even remotely related to the national conflict (recall that most selected Neo-Nazis or communists), the reduction in aggregate tolerance levels due to conflict intensity is especially staggering.

The limitations of this study preclude the separation of perceived threat to the state from perceived personal threat. As Gibson (2006) asserts, the multidimensionality of the concept of threat needs further investigation. This research has confirmed a new pathway for cross-national tolerance analysis, but much more needs to be done to fully understand the processes at work.

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